

PEOPLE
EATON, MARY

The Clipper Visits Mary Eaton

BY JUDY FOLEY

She's known as "the produce lady" in her horse-drawn wagon; "the animal lady" who confesses to be a sucker for any sick or injured animal and would like to watch birds of prey roam her land; "odd-jobs lady" who has, when the moment arose, joined a search-and-rescue team in the Washington state mountains, worked with exceptional children, volunteered at the Trilside Museum, and built a shelter for her 1,800 pound workhorse, Ben.

She's Mary Eaton: young, slight, hard-working and committed to a lifestyle which, while in vogue today, she follows because it's the only natural way to go.

She cans and freezes most of her own food. She once saved a herd of horses from neglect and starvation, and now wants to save horses from speeding cars. She gave birth to her son Alex at home with a midwife present (and -- a compromise, perhaps -- an ambulance in the driveway). Her life is threaded with the complex, interwoven details of a simple and natural life in today's imposing world.

A winding, gutted dirt road leads to the Eaton 11-acre tract of land. Her vegetable wagon, imprinted with *Eaton's Produce* in faded lettering, is propped up waiting for repairs. Two geese wander across the yard among a mixture of chicken coops, horse corrals and goat sheds. To one side is a 1/2-acre garden in the midst of harvest.

This has been both home and work to Mary Howe Eaton, a mature 24, since her marriage 2 years ago to rock musician and lyricist Nick. Their house, constructed with peg-and-beam, is spacious and airy and comfortable. She was in the kitchen, surrounded by mountains of tomatoes and jars. "Harvest time," he said. "I see tomatoes in my sleep." She gardens, takes care of the animals, does carpentry, and constantly burns a seemingly never-ending supply of energy, usually with Alex in tow. Nick helps with the heavy work, but his schedule is full and often conflicts with hers, so tending the land is generally Mary's job. "I like hard work." Then, "It took me a long time to realize that Nick's music was work. But it is, a different kind but just as hard." He writes lyrics and performs with the group *Maxxi Rocco* from Boston to Cape Cod, and recently cut a demo tape that is circulating around local radio stations. "There can be a lot of pressure."

Their first child, Alex, was a homebirth, she said straightout. "I've always seen birth at home as the



Mary Eaton holds the reins of Bob, a Percheron horse, which draws the "Eaton's Produce" wagon around town. Mary's helper is Heather Griffiths of Kingston. Mary and her husband, Nicky, live on Joy St. (off Temple St.) with their baby, some goats, chickens, dogs, cats and 3 horses. "We have 85 mouths to feed," says Mary.

swept up in a sudden rush of river water. "I was nearly drowned. We found one of the girls' shoes. Their bodies were recovered later."

Two years ago, during the Blizzard of '78, she and friend Lynn Peterson of Duxbury's Puddin' Farm discovered a group of neglected horses in a Middleboro barn. Getting no help from the MSPCA or the local board of health, the 2 girls went on another rescue mission. "First we tried to buy them, but the owner asked exorbitant prices -- they weren't worth much by that time. We actually thought about stealing them. But we arranged the killer (animal slaughterer) to buy them for horsemeat. They were wild, without human contact, and starved. They had to be drugged and put on medication. Some broodmares and stallions died. But it worked out beautifully; we saved about 9, and others were eventually sent to Connecticut."

Her latest effort is aimed at improving driver awareness around horseback riders.

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my mind — except in an emergency, of course, so here was an ambulance in the driveway towards the end of the delivery. My father took pictures, and we have tape recordings of his first sounds. We'd like to have more children, and when we do, Alex will be here too." Alex, a delightful blonde toddler, is as comfortable around the animals as his mother, while he learns an instinctive respect for nature and the sounds of the barnyard firsthand. "We believe in raising him without stifling his curiosity, and his awareness is amazing. He's allowed to fully express his feelings; he has the right to be sad or angry when something is wrong. If you stifle a child's feelings, basically you're telling him his feelings don't count."

Her goal, she says, is to be self-sufficient. "I'd like to stay out of the supermarket completely if possible." Besides putting up her own produce, she gets eggs from the chickens (or they end up in the freezer), and milk from the goat. Heat comes from a wood stove and passive solar energy. But her plans go even further: to a milking cow for cheese and butter, an herb garden "for medicinal purposes as well as spices," and wind power for electricity. "I'd like to get to the point where I rely on horse-and-wagon, and not use a car," she said, although she's as comfortable on a motorcycle as she is on horseback. "It's a lifelong dream, to learn not to be dependent on anyone. Because in the end nobody will take care of you except yourself." They are ambitious goals, she admits. "We never use the word 'try,' we say the word 'do.'"

Her wagon and produce business, which gets her up at dawn every morning in season to go to the market and through the streets of Duxbury, were plagued with problems this year, and she was only on the road a few weeks. First there was a workhorse who turned out to be "crazy" when harnessed. But she is determined to make it work, "if it takes 10 years to do it right." The horse was replaced by Ben, a huge, gentle horse from Vermont who Mary swears can plow the road if a severe winter blocks them in.

Horses have been an integral part of her life and remain her "number one love, next to my family," she said. She grew up on a Norwell Arabian horsefarm and owns 2 horses, besides old Ben: one brought back from Washington, the other found abandoned and nursed back to health. She has traveled to Washington, Oregon, Wyoming, New Jersey and Connecticut, and managed to work with horses wherever she went. She did a 3-month volunteer stint with a search-and-rescue team through the northwest mountains, when she helped find a 6-year-old boy and a 19-year-old retarded boy lost in the ranges and, unsuccessfully, tried to rescue 2 girls

who were caught up by development. She started an organization, WHGA (We're Horse Owners for Awareness), and hopes to enlist at least one representative from each riding and pony club. She planned a horseback rally to draw attention to the issue, but found that avenue riddled with hidden expenses and "hassles" in getting parade permits, and interest waned. The next step, she says, will be through political channels with legislation to make drivers slow down when a rider signals in a palm-down motion of the hand. "Now cars are required to slow down if they see a horse in trouble, but that's not enough. A horse may look calm, but could be in big trouble by the time a car passes at high speeds. 5-10 MPH is a good speed to pass a horse, and it only takes a few seconds to slow down."

"It's hard just taking your horse for a ride. I've been sworn at, I've had things thrown at me, I've been whipped by antenna and run off the road. I've had Alex with me, and mothers with cars full of kids will speed past." An exasperated smile: "About the only ones who do slow down are the mothers who want to give their kids too close a look... But it's only a question of awareness." She has a calm, serious confidence about the project, and shows no frustrations in her early problems getting off the ground — only determination to succeed.

Horses, chickens, ducks, cats, dogs, squirrels — she's at home around them all. "I'm hoping to get a few birds of prey from the Trailside Museum to keep on the property. There's enough on the land to support them. I enjoy watching them glide; they're free and keen, and have a constant awareness that few people possess." Except Mary Eaton, who soars through life aware and in tune with everything around her.